
[Politics](#) [Immigration](#) [Housing](#) [Education](#) [Economy](#) [Environment](#)

HIGHER EDUCATION

UC researchers are pushing back on Trump's UCLA grant suspensions. Here's how



BY MIKHAIL ZINSHTEYN

AUGUST 5, 2025

[Republish](#)



A person uses their laptop at the UCLA campus in Los Angeles on Feb. 18, 2022. Photo by Raquel Natalicchio for CalMatters

IN SUMMARY

UC researchers claim a judge's previous order barred the National Science Foundation from suspending UCLA's grants.

A federal judge today ordered lawyers for the Trump administration to explain why last week's suspension of about [300 UCLA grants](#) by the National Science Foundation does not run afoul of that judge's June order barring the agency from terminating additional grants.

The California district court judge, Rita F. Lin, [set a hearing for Aug. 12](#). Lin's order is a response to a [Monday filing](#) from lawyers representing University of California researchers. They wrote in their filing to Lin that the science foundation must undo last week's suspensions. Their filing is part of an ongoing case that challenged the legality of the National Science Foundation's terminating 114 UC grants this spring over alleged Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion violations. Lin [issued a preliminary injunction in June](#) ordering the science foundation to restore the grants and barred the agency from additional terminations.

Lawyers for the UC professors believe their filing is the first legal challenge to the National Science Foundation's decision last week to suspend UCLA's grants. Federal Department of Justice lawyers representing the science agency argue the suspensions do not violate Lin's June preliminary injunction.

READ NEXT



UCLA research grants suspended after Trump administration faulted campus for antisemitism

JULY 31, 2025

The latest dispute highlights the extent to which ongoing and new legal challenges feed off each other. It's also the latest chapter in the Trump administration's multi-pronged efforts to cancel university research funding and punish campuses for alleged DEI violations. [Some federal judges](#)

have faulted the Trump administration for never defining what it considers DEI but cancelling funding to schools based on those violations anyway.

With [last week's suspensions](#), around \$170 million in grant funding are on pause and researchers at UCLA cannot use any remaining funding to conduct their experiments. The National Science Foundation is among the largest sources of science research grants to universities. Campuses rely on the funding to make scientific breakthroughs, provide graduate students training and sustain the research apparatus that has made the U.S. arguably the world's leader in scientific discovery.

The UCLA suspensions followed a federal Department of Justice report last week that accused the campus of not doing enough to [address antisemitism](#), particularly related to events during last year's pro-Palestine protests. The report came months after UCLA commissioned a task force to investigate antisemitism on campus and come up with recommendations that UCLA leaders said they'd implement.

The Department of Justice told UCLA it [has until today](#) to signal a willingness to come to an agreement to address antisemitism. Otherwise, the department said it will file a complaint with a federal court by Sept. 2.

How a June court case is related to UCLA suspensions

In June, Lin ordered the National Science Foundation to reinstate 114 National Science Foundation grants to UCLA that the agency terminated in the spring. She also barred the agency from freezing most other grants. Lin ordered two other agencies that terminated UC grants to do the same —

The Environmental Protection Agency and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The latter two agencies appealed that decision but in the meantime [all three](#) agencies [returned](#) the grants to UC researchers by mid-July.

Lin's order [affected two types of grants](#): those the federal agencies cancelled with a termination form that used vague or generic language about the project not meeting agency priorities or those the agencies claimed ran afoul of President Donald Trump's bans on DEI funding.

After the science foundation suspended UCLA's grants on Wednesday, lawyers for the UC researchers wrote to the district court judge on Monday to argue [the agency was violating her order](#) because the grant funding was in effect halted by the suspensions.

In response, federal Department of Justice lawyers wrote to Lin on Monday that [a suspension isn't the same as a termination](#), which is what Lin barred in her June preliminary injunction. And they say that the suspensions weren't based on Trump's executive orders but instead on the science foundation's accusations that UCLA uses race-based admissions, allows transgender women to compete in women's sports and hasn't done enough to address antisemitism on its campus. All three points were [laid out in a letter](#) a National Science Foundation administrator, Lisa Scott-Morring, sent to UCLA on Aug. 1.

California has barred public campuses from admitting students based on race since voters in 1996 ended the practice. Scott-Morring acknowledged in her letter to UCLA Chancellor Julio Frenk that the campus maintains it doesn't use affirmative action, but wrote that its "holistic review"

admissions process is de-facto race-based admissions.

The National Science Foundation believes that “UCLA’s ‘holistic review’ admissions process, which considers factors such as an applicant’s neighborhood/zip code, family income, and school profile — and invites the disclosure of an applicant’s race via personal statements — is a transparent attempt to engage in race-based admissions in all but name,” Scott-Morring wrote.

While the Supreme Court in 2023 overturned the use of race in college admissions in a 6-3 decision, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote on behalf of the majority that students are free to discuss their identities and overcoming hardships in admissions essays.

“Nothing in this opinion should be construed as prohibiting universities from considering an applicant’s discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise,” [Roberts wrote](#).

All three criticisms in Scott-Morring’s letter [match the policies](#) Trump is pursuing through executive actions to reshape higher education and the federal government. They also resemble the policy playbook fleshed out in [Project 2025](#), a conservative publication that [has shaped Trump’s current term in office](#).

“NSF is willing to work with UCLA to identify corrective actions to bring UCLA into compliance. UCLA must acknowledge in writing its willingness to discuss these corrective actions by August 15,” Scott-

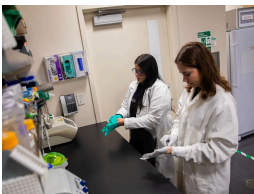
Morring wrote.

Lawyers for the UC professors argued that the Scott-Morring letters aren't strong enough justifications to suspend the grants. "Both letters entirely fail to explain why the specific project was found to be incompatible with the Agency's priorities," the lawyers wrote to Lin on Monday. They stress the lack of explanation for why individual awards were terminated because that was one of their winning arguments that led Lin to order the grants reinstated in June.

And they argue that the distinction between a termination and a suspension "is purely semantic" because either way, researchers cannot access their funding.

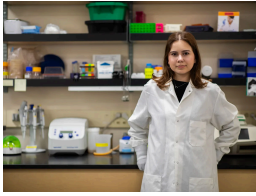
"NSF has violated the Preliminary Injunction and must immediately rescind the suspension of grants implicated in the July 30 and August 1 Letters," the lawyers for the UC researchers wrote on Monday.

[READ NEXT](#)



Trump cancelled millions in California research grants. Judges want to restore them

JUNE 24, 2025



Another casualty of Trump research cuts? California students who want to be scientists

MAY 22, 2025